Unit .15

Session .04

God Answers a Confused Prophet

Scripture

Habakkuk 1:2-6, 12-13; 2:3-4; 3:16-19

2 How long, Lord, must I call for help and you do not
listen or cry out to you about violence and you do not
save? **3** Why do you force me to look at injustice? Why
do you tolerate wrongdoing? Oppression and violence
are right in front of me. Strife is ongoing, and conflict
escalates. **4** This is why the law is ineffective and justice
never emerges. For the wicked restrict the righteous;
therefore, justice comes out perverted. **5** Look at the
nations and observe—be utterly astounded! For I am
doing something in your days that you will not believe
when you hear about it. **6** Look! I am raising up the
Chaldeans, that bitter, impetuous nation that marches
across the earth's open spaces to seize territories not its
own. ... **12** Are you not from eternity, Lord my God?
My Holy One, you will not die. Lord, you appointed
them to execute judgment; my Rock, you destined them
to punish us. **13** Your eyes are too pure to look on evil,
and you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. So why do you
tolerate those who are treacherous? Why are you silent
while one who is wicked swallows up one who is more
righteous than himself? ... **3** For the vision is yet for the
appointed time; it testifies about the end and will not
lie. Though it delays, wait for it, since it will certainly
come and not be late. **4** Look, his ego is inflated; he
is without integrity. But the righteous one will live by
his faith. ... **16** I heard, and I trembled within; my lips
quivered at the sound. Rottenness entered my bones;
I trembled where I stood. Now I must quietly wait for
the day of distress to come against the people invading
us. **17** Though the fig tree does not bud and there is
no fruit on the vines, though the olive crop fails and
the fields produce no food, though the flocks disappear
from the pen and there are no herds in the stalls, **18** yet
I will celebrate in the Lord; I will rejoice in the God of
my salvation! **19** The Lord my Lord is my strength;
he makes my feet like those of a deer and enables me to
walk on mountain heights! For the choir director: on
stringed instruments.

Intro Options

Main Point:
Joy is rooted in relationship with God, not circumstances.

Option 1

The children's minister at your church has come to your youth group. The children's families have had an unusually long run of bad luck. Parents have lost jobs; the kids have been unfairly accused at school; extended family has fallen sick. The little kids have fallen despondent and angry; "That's not fair!" and "God doesn't play nice!" are frequent outcries in the children's area of the church. The minister has come to ask your youth group to comfort these kids. They'd love it if your group would make cards for the kids giving them hope and inspiration that God is fair. Have your students prepare their cards (remember, these are for small kids) and then share them. What kind of promises and assurances did your students share? How do these ideas line up with Habakkuk? Use whatever connections you can see to lead into the lesson.

Option 2

Imagine the Red Cross has called on your students for help. The Red Cross has done a great job at responding to the physical needs of people experiencing evil (whether that evil is a natural disaster or a mass human infliction of pain). However, they're finding that the people's emotional and spiritual response is just as important as their physical needs. They've decided to create "Emergency Response Kits" directed toward people's spiritual needs after a disaster or other horror. They want your students to counsel them on what to put into the kits. Money isn't a concern, though space is. The kits could contain poetry, hymns or songs on CD or MP3 player; they could contain index cards with Bible verses or devotions on them; they could contain small trinkets that somehow are to bring hope; the students' imagination is the limit. Have them break into small groups and come up with ideas for specific items to share with the people. What verses would they use? What promises would they offer? See what students come up with. If there is any overlap with the promises and solace Habakkuk offers, use that overlap to segue into Habakkuk. If not, suggest that Habakkuk might offer some ideas for these kits.

TEACHING PLAN

The Book of Habakkuk opens with a prophet grappling with God. Habakkuk struggled to understand why God would delay his judgment on wicked Judah. There is no doubt Habakkuk loved the people of God and longed to see them spiritually restored. Yet he questioned why God would allow His people to sin without consequence. Then, after God declared His coming judgment, Habakkuk again questioned God, this time on His method of judgment. God's message to Habakkuk is a message we need to hear today with all the injustice in our world. God has authority over all things, and even though events may be confusing to us, we can live with faith and joy as we place our trust in Him.

Read Habakkuk 1:2-6.

The Book of Habakkuk's opening verses record the prophet's impassioned plea to God. Habakkuk saw violence and injustice all around and wondered how God could tolerate such evil behavior from Judah. Sin grieved the heart of Habakkuk, because sin should always grieve the hearts of God's people. "How long?" he asked. Habakkuk asked God hard honest questions, the kind we still ask today. The prophet was justified in his frustration as he witnessed firsthand the reality that life isn't fair, but he wrongly interpreted God's apparent silence as either indifference or as a license for Judah to keep sinning.

- **Looking at the state of the world, where are you tempted to place God's response to sin and injustice on this scale?**

Helpless ○ ○ ○ **Indifferent** ○ ○ ○ **Grieved** ○ ○ ○ **Active**

Habakkuk longed for God to deal justly with the injustice in Judah, and he desired to see revival return to Judah as it had been during the days of King Josiah. Yet he struggled to trust God's timing in these matters. We all must wait patiently on God's timing and trust that sometimes God hides from us what He is doing so we can learn to walk by faith and not by sight.

Habakkuk used a number of words in verses 2-3 to describe what he had witnessed among God's people: violence, injustice, wrongdoing, oppression, strife, and conflict. Faced with the distressing injustice happening to his people in his own land, Habakkuk responded by calling for God to act. God told His prophet to pay attention to the surrounding nations because He was raising up a powerful, pagan people to punish Judah: the Chaldeans, also known as the Babylonians. God's response provoked a number of emotions within Habakkuk. Yes, it pleased him to know that God was concerned, engaged, and had a plan for addressing the injustices occurring in Judah. But the confused prophet did not understand why God would give power and triumph to a nation like Babylon that was even more evil than Judah. God Himself already described the Chaldeans as guilty, and their god was their own strength (vv. 5-11). Wouldn't giving them victory endorse the Babylonian's wickedness? We discover here that God was teaching Habakkuk a lesson to trust His authority over injustice. God had a plan in place, but it certainly wasn't the plan that Habakkuk would have scripted because God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours (Isa. 55:8-9).

- **What are some examples in Scripture and in your life of God working in unexpected ways to accomplish His good purposes?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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Habakkuk 1

2-6. Habakkuk's ministry occurred at the end of the seventh century, in the waning years of Judah. He was a contemporary of Nahum, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah.[1] He likely ministered during the reign of Jehoiakim, barely a decade removed from the spiritual revival Judah experienced under Jehoiakim's father, King Josiah. Unlike Josiah, Jehoiakim was politically and spiritually corrupt; he rejected the spiritual reforms his father had made. The dishonesty and injustice that thrived during Jehoiakim's reign provided the historical backdrop for Habakkuk's dialogue with God. The opening verses of Habakkuk reveal a prophet who was burdened for his people, like a parent burdened for an erring child. Habakkuk hoped for revival but feared God's punishment would be catalyst needed for cleansing His people.

12. Habakkuk was hopeful in the face of judgment because of his history and relationship of trust with Yahweh. He knows that it is Yahweh, "my God," who is everlasting, who speaks. His relationship with the author of eternity is personal. He has the benefit of an eternal perspective, even in the face of suffering punishment for the sins of those around him. Although he cannot understand why the whole city must suffer, he knows from personal experience that Yahweh is good, addressing him as "my Holy One" (v. 12).[2]

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 88, DDG)

The Problem of Evil

Many atheists have argued that if God is all-powerful, all-loving, and knows everything, then evil would not exist in the world as humans know it today. But because evil exists in the world, God must not exist (or if He does exist, then He is not good or all-powerful). Despite its powerful rhetoric, appealing to evil as an argument against God fails: first, because outrage over bad things in this world presupposes a "good" moral standard that does not exist apart from God, and second, because God could have a good reason (though unknown to us) for allowing evil and suffering to continue for a season. Given what we know about God's character and purposes, Christians can rest assured that even in the midst of evil, God is working all things for our good (Rom. 8:28).

TEACHING PLAN

Read Habakkuk 1:12-13; 2:3-4.

Habakkuk was confused by God's response to him. He struggled to reconcile his understanding of God's perfect character with the prophecy revealed to him. In Habakkuk's mind, God is too pure to associate with wicked people, let alone use them. But Habakkuk was misguided in believing God's character would not allow him to use enemy nations to discipline His people. It happened with the Assyrians and the fall of Israel beforehand in 722 BC, and it would happen again. Of course, that wouldn't mean that God approved of Babylon in any way. Their reign would be short-lived as well (2:6-20), for death and judgment await all who reject the Lord. For Habakkuk and all the others who remained faithful to God, their response should be one of faith—trusting in God during these darkest of days.

- **In your own words, how would you describe what it looks like for someone to live by faith?**
- **Does living by faith mean living blindly? Why or why not?**

Read Habakkuk 3:16-19.

Having questioned God's plans and heard God's responses, Habakkuk trembled in fear. His experience left him weak and shaken yet full of faith and joy. God took Habakkuk on a spiritual pilgrimage, and this sanctifying journey moved him from confusion and worry to contentment and worship. God prophesied the complete collapse of Judah, yet Habakkuk learned to trust God even as everything around him fell apart. The power of God washed away doubt and fear to the point that Habakkuk was able to wait confidently and patiently for the day when God would make all things right.

The book's closing three verses are some of the most moving verses in the Bible. Through the centuries, they have been used by God in the lives of countless believers to give strength and hope in the midst of life's hurt and pain. With these words, Habakkuk finally acknowledged his absolute faith in God's plan.

Verses 17-19 communicate two main thoughts. The first thought is that God's judgment against Judah will be devastating. Habakkuk describes Judah's punishment by listing the demise of its main sources of food and agricultural commerce: fig trees, grape vines, olive trees, produce, sheep, and cattle. The second thought is that Habakkuk's faith is unwavering despite the pending pain of judgment. The prophet declared his faith in saying "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord." Habakkuk finally found the joy in his journey, and it wasn't dependent upon the circumstances surrounding him. Nor was it found in thwarting God's plan or even completely understanding God's plan, but in trusting the good, sovereign, and faithful God who saves and strengthens those who live by faith.

- **Do you tend to base your joy in your salvation in Christ or in your circumstances? What do we communicate about God and His worth when we find our joy in His salvation versus how our circumstances are turning out?**

COMMENTARY

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Habakkuk 3

17-19. Of all the wonderful passages of the Old Testament, the climax to Habakkuk's psalm fits as one of the great affirmations of faith. His circumstances have not changed. The outer world with its evil conduct and rapacious warfare remains the same. God's people remain in time of lamentation. The prophet, however, turns to praise. Why? He had heard God's voice and seen God's vision. He knows the ultimate outcome of history."[3]

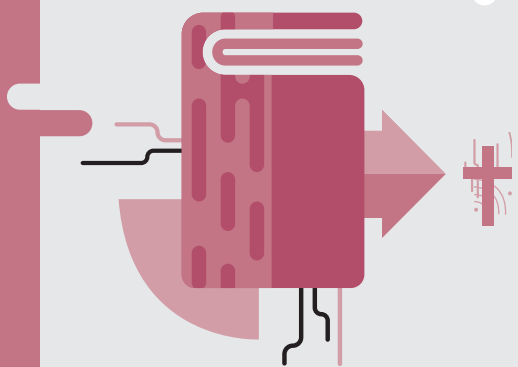
Famines, pestilence, persecution — these happen so that the world might see in the followers of Jesus, and discover for themselves, that God made us for himself and that he is our "exceeding joy" (Ps. 43:4 ESV), and "at [his] right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11 ESV). The losses of life are meant to wean us off the poisonous pleasures of the world and lure us to Christ as our everlasting joy. The sorrows of the world make it possible for us to rejoice in sorrow and show that Jesus is more valuable than all the world.[4]

Activity

As a group, come up with a list of situations where people might suffer injustice. It could be as small an example as a sibling getting blamed for another sibling's action or a foul not being called in a sport to something as big as being wrongly imprisoned or imprisoned for a good thing (like being imprisoned for being a Christian in a communist country). Break students in pairs or trios and assign each group on of the situations you came up with. Have students come up with how they would use Habakkuk to comfort the victim in that particular situation (they can either do a skit showing them comforting the person or state a message they would send to that person). Give them some time to share their productions and debrief what was great about them.

(p. 90, DDG) Christ Connection

Habakkuk lived at a time when evil seemed to be everywhere. By faith, he trusted God's promise that God would deliver His people. Injustice, violence, and wickedness surround us today, but we can live by faith and trust that Jesus will return one day to make all things right.



GOD ANSWERS A CONFUSED PROPHET

Habakkuk 1:2–6, 12–13; 2:3–4; 3:16–19

GOD ANSWERS A CONFUSED PROPHET

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JESUS CONNECTION

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LIFEWISE QUALITY

JOY – Having a cheerful response regardless of my circumstances.

HEAD

Habakkuk struggled to understand what God was doing. He began to doubt God as he witnessed the violence and injustice all around him. But by the end of the passage (3:17–19), how was Habakkuk responding?

Did Habakkuk's circumstances change? What was his response rooted in?

HEART

What is the difference between happiness and joy? Why do we pursue happiness instead of joy?

The world is full of evil. If we haven't already experienced it, we will someday, probably soon. God's interaction with Habakkuk gave him joy in the face of great difficulty. What is your response to God's answers to Habakkuk?

HANDS

Rewrite Habakkuk 3:17–18. Replace Habakkuk's imagery in verse 17 with scenarios from our day and age (example: "Though no one shares a single post of mine on social media"), but copy verse 18 exactly. Hang it up where you can see it daily and ask God to help you rejoice in Him no matter what.